

(٤) الرواية التاريخية

المعركة الحاسمة في الحرب العالمية الثانية كما تراها أوليفيا ماننج في «ثلاثية الشرق»

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تتناول «ثلاثية الشرق The Levant Trilogy للكتابة الإنجليزية أوليفيا ماننج (١٩٠٨ - ١٩٨٠) المرحلة الأخيرة من الحرب العالمية الثانية. وتروي أحداثها في ثلاث روايات متتالية الأحداث وهي :

The Danger Tree, The Battle Lost and Won. The Sum of Things .

وحيث أن المؤلفة عملت ملحقة صحفية في السفارة الأمريكية بالقاهرة عام ١٩٤٢ فإن سردها لوقائع معركة الصحراء تتسم بالدقة بجانب تصويرها لحياة الإنجليز في مصر خلال هذه الفترة. فقدمت لنا صورة حية للعسكريين والمدنيين على السواء، فالمحاربون في الصحراء العربية والمدنيون في جاردن سيتي وجروبي جزاء لا يتجزأان لصورة واحدة . وإن كان منظور أوليفيا ماننج للمصريين يتفق مع رؤية معاصريها أمثال لورنس داريل و پ . هـ ينوبى في ازديادهم لمصر فإن «ثلاثية الشرق» اختلفت عنهما في عدة نواح: فأحداث الثلاثية التي تتعدى مصر وتشمل العلمين، قُدمت من خلال رؤية العديد من أعضاء الجالية الإنجليزية التي ارتبطت أحاسيسهم ومشاعرهم الإنسانية بمشاكل الحرب والمكان . ومن هنا تتفوق ما ننجز على معاصريها لأنها تصور مخاوف ومعاناة ومشاكل الشخصيات بشفافية فائقة وإحساس مرهف . فالثلاثية تبدأ كرواية تاريخية عن حرب الصحراء ولكنها تتحول إلى مأساة إنسانية .

ولقد تطورت معالجة موضوع الحرب تطوراً ملحوظاً . ومحتويات وتقنيات كل رواية على حدة تختلف عن الأخرى حتى أصبحت الثلاثية نسيجاً من الوقائع التاريخية الدقيقة والمشاعر والقيم الإنسانية . فالرواية الأولى أقرب إلى التاريخ تبدأ أحداثها قبل معركة العلمين وتصف الاستعدادات للحرب والمواجهة الأولى للألمان . أما الرواية الثانية فتقدم وصف دقائق معركة العلمين كخلفية تاريخية لصراع الشخصيات التي تحارب في جبهة أخرى من أجل المبادئ والقيم الثابتة وفي الرواية الأخيرة سيخسر التاريخ الذي سيطر على الرواية الأولى أمام الدوافع الإنسانية والتغييرات الجذرية التي مرت بها الشخصيات خلال تجربة الحرب القاسية .

(*) أستاذ الأدب الإنجليزي . ورئيس قسم اللغة الانجليزية بكلية البنات جامعة عين شمس

***The Novel As Documentary The Decisive Battle
in World War II As Seen by Olivia Manning in
The Levant Trilogy***

By
Dr. Fadila M. Fattouh

*When I have completed a book, I feel I have said
all I can say concerning it. My subject is simply
life as I have experienced it and I am happiest
when writing of things I have known.*

Journalist-novelist Olivia Manning (1908-1980), who worked as a press officer in the U.S.A. Embassy in Cairo in 1942, evokes in **The Levant Trilogy**(1) the history and background of the decisive battle of Alamein which settled the last phase of World War II. Not only does she depict the precise details of the desert war and its sensuous "backcloth"(2); but, with a deep insight into character and situation, she also presents a true image of life in the: "British Colony"(3) in Egypt. The complex relationships of the British community during the war, both the military and the civilians are clearly drawn by Olivia Manning. The soldiers fighting in the Sahara desert are juxtaposed with their counterparts, the counterparts, the civilians living in Garden City.

The Levant Trilogy(4) as it develops the story of the latter's hero and heroine, Guy and Harriet Pringle after they have been evacuated from Rumania. Both trilogies trace the relationship between the newly married couple against the events of the Second World War: first in Rumania and, secondly,

in Egypt. But the introduction of Simon Boulderstone in **The Levant Trilogy** sets the two series apart and renders the latter a unique structure that is immediately observed in its first volume, **The Danger Tree**. The creation of a new hero for **The Levant Trilogy** is a fundamental structural innovation that adds depth and richness to the trilogy. As Harriet Pringle depicts the corruption, disintegration and defeat of Rumania in **The Balkan Trilogy**, Simon Boulderstone portrays the setting and details of the Alamein battle, the suffering of the soldiers and the victory of the Allies, leaving to Harriet Pringle and her circle the portrayal of the new plot in **The Danger Tree** and its development in the following two volumes: **The Battle Lost and Won** and **The Sum of Things**. Simon Boulderstone is the real hero of the trilogy and it is his experience that essentially gives the novels their documentary quality as Olivia Manning renders the historical events in entirely personal terms.

The opening of **The Danger Tree** indicates that the adventures of Simon will be set against an image of life in Egypt: first, in Cairo; later in other parts of the country. Gradually, the progress of the action reveals that his experience is inseparable from both the University war events and the Egyptians from the British fighter's view-point since he first sets foot in Suez. As he is asked to take a train and report to Abbassia barracks he learns that Tobruk fell into the hands of the Germans. Thus:

*Waiting at the station, Simon was numb with solitude. Everything about him. The small houses packed between dry enclosing hills, the sparkling glare of oil tanks, the white dockside buildings that reflected the sky's heat, the dusty earth on which he stood-increased his anguish of loss. He had never before seen such a wilderness or known such loneliness (p. 10, *The Danger Tree*).*

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He reaches Cairo "alone" after the loss of his two friends in Suez, an event that makes Egypt seem to him "the most arid place on earth". The impact of the bad war news is reflected in his description of Suez and Cairo. Similarly, when he arrives at the Abbassia Barracks the first thing that attracts his attention becomes "the Bugs that lived there for centuries" and when he wakes in the middle of the night he only remembers his brother's letters describing the flies in Egypt, a detail that may be best illustrated by what Erskin B. Childers stated in **The Road To Suez**. He maintains that hundreds of thousands of British soldiers stationed in the Middle-east wrote home about nothing but the:

*sleazy night- haunts, dark and dirty bazaars, dis-
ease of their fleshly counterparts, cunning souve-
nir merchants, thieves by night and angry mobs by
day(6).*

This is the first impression of Egypt, perceived and expressed by an English soldier newly arrived in Cairo. The early pages of **The Danger Tree** show the importance of place in the novels of Olivia Manning; but they also designate that the mirror of Egypt is partial. Suez, with its houses packed under the heat of the sun, the bugs in the Abbassia Barracks and the flies "that were created to plague the Egyptians" are the only things that attract the British soldier's eye. The narrow personal aspect impairs the realistic description though it serves the aesthetic objective of the novel which, primarily, aims at portraying the Second World War and its background from a purely British viewpoint. **The Danger Tree** traces the course of the desert war against a limited view of life in the Egyptian cities: "Cairo, the flesh-pot: (p. 14) and its inhabitants, the "wogs" (pp. 12, 19, 20) occupy a minor part that is either partially and ironically described or tersely alluded to in the background.

Waiting to be transferred to the front line, Simon looks for Edwina, his

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brother's girlfriend, in Garden City where he ironically says "There was nothing that looked like a garden or a Garden City" (p. 14) As soon as he reaches her flat he joins his compatriots in a tour round Cairo. In delineating Cairo, Olivia Manning, the press reporter, uses such cryptic allusions that diminish the grandeur and beauty of the City's monuments as well as its scenery. Driving along the Nile, Clifford tells Simon: "This is the Nile" and, "Simon looked out on the wide, grey-silver river moving with the slow lurch and swell of a snake between banks of grey and yellow mud. "(P. 18) Reaching Giza:

Clifford waved at the windscreen and said, 'There you are' and Simon seeing the blunt, battered face of the sphinx, gasped in amazement. Then came the pyramids.. And they were like shadows out of the haze-or rather, one was, taking shape and then another, smaller, pyramid sifted out from behind its neighbour and there were two, growing substantial and standing four-square on the sandy rock(19)

Harriet Pringle is reluctant to enter the pyramid because "The Pyramid's outer casing of stone had been looted away and the inner structure had sunk on itself like a ruined plum-pudding".(2) Sitting in the Pension Wilk "she saw nothing but the Pyramids that were visible only in early morning and at sunset, looking as small as the little metal Pyramids that were used as pencil sharpeners". (p. 50) Guy Pringle" would scarcely give the Pyramids a glance. He found them neither beautiful nor useful and said he did not like them". (p. 60) Simon Boulderstone could not see in the Egyptians anything but their shabby appearance, poverty and disease:

*The pavements were more crowded than usual.
Some of the men were so new to commerce that*

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they still wore the galabiah but most of them had managed to fit themselves out with trousers and jackets. Some had even taken to wearing the fez. Many were pock-marked or had only one seeing eye, the other being white and sightless from trachoma; many were enervated by bilharzia, but they were all rising in the world, leaving behind the peasants and the back street balani from whom they derived (p. 75).

Further on the Egyptians are described as "very poor men.. not strong.. the fellah, weakened by hunger and bilharzia could not do much". (p.109) In "Cairo, back from the Blue", an article published in **The Sunday Times Magazine**, Olivia Manning relates the weakness of the Egyptians to that disease:

Some European children who paddled on their Nile-soaked lands contracted bilharzia, the disease that enervated the Egyptian peasants so they had not the spirit of revolt(8).

A comparison between some extracts from the above mentioned article and their equivalents in **The Danger Tree** clearly illustrates that the style and subject matter in both works are almost identical. No great difference can be perceived in the approach and concepts of Olivia Manning, the British journalist - novelist. Most of the details reported in her article are elaborated in the same critical ironic style of the "foreigner" (9) whose personal experience and background have deprived her of seeing the other side of the picture. Reminiscences of Harriet Pringle's journey from Cairo to Alexandria, passing by Tanta, include a description of the provincial town in terms that do not vary much from its portrayal in the article. The analogy between the novel and the article validates a principal quality of the art of Oliv-

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ia Manning. No matter how detached she seems to be from her creations, the autobiographical element emerges between the lines of her writings. Criticizing **The Balkan Trilogy**, Harry J. Mooney states that:

To the laminating, accreting experience of the characters is added a reinforcing sense of the writer's own mind and eye. Though the author never intrudes directly, and though her narrative presence seems deliberately restrained.. she impresses me as a writer whose experience as historical witness compels her to creativity (10).

In **The Danger Tree** this attribute becomes more pronounced with the identification of the heroine, Harriet Pringle, who may be taken for the writer herself as "she had come jittery out of Rumania and then out of Greece, and now she lived in expectation of being driven out of Egypt". Besides, "She's in the American information Office", (p. 26) the "Assistant press officer" in the U.S.A. Embassy in Cairo. (p. 66) Reminiscences of the Balkans hover over the pages of the novel. Harriet met Professor Lord pinkrose in Bucharest. (p. 28) saw "the German news films in Bucharest" (p. 74) and "experienced an earthquake in Bucharest (p. 105) Talking about "their last day in Bucharest" (p. 92) Dobson mentions that "Guy was the only organization (12) man in Rumania who stuck it out to the end". (13) In addition, the references to Greece are also reflections and memories of the author's life in Greece before she accompanied her husband to Rumania. Reaching Alexandria. Guy and Harriet Pringle "still mourned for Greece and their memories of Geece, and Egypt evoked in them disgust and a fear of its strangeness". (p. 52) To Olivia Manning, as well as her contemporary, Lawrence Durrell, the derision of Egypt and the yearning for Greece are closely affiliated to their personal experience. Greece is associated with culture. cleanliness and peace, while Egypt, with disease, dirt and war.

The ironic tone is manifested in the restrained references to Islam. The Moslems are shown as incapable of understanding the European elevated style of life. Referring to Hassan, the safragi, Beaker says;" ... we live here in a sort of family freedom that is incomprehensible to the Moslem mind. Hassan can no more understand the innocence of our proximity than you can understand his grins and giggles". (p. 37) And Harriet thinks that the Egyptians" saw the inmates of the flat as immoral and ridiculous, and they were contemptuous of a way of life they could not understand". (p. 170) The call for prayer is scornfully cited as the "wailing" notes of the muezzins that roused "the kites" from sleep, (p. 51) The irony is accelerated till it reaches its peak in delineating two moslem women of the upper class at Groppi's in the following words:

The women, dressed in an embellished version of Parisian fashion, wore black dresses to which they had added broaches, necklaces and sprays of flowers. Their skirts ended an inch above the knee but their sleeves, as required by the prophet, came down to their wrists. (p. 127).

Besides, Olivia Manning does not forget to discriminate between Moslems and copts. The secretary of the British Institute "a copt" and Mrs. Wilk, the owner of the pension is:

... a Copt, married during the first war to a British Officer who had gone home leaving her with nothing but a British passport. Now she realised if the British were finished she too, was finished, and the tears overflowed from her wrinkled eyelids and trickled down her withered cheeks (p. 49).

With a discerning eye that shows a profound understanding of the nature

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of her characters, Olivia Manning depicts the true mutual feelings of the Egyptians and the British. This is what she writes about the misconceptions of the English soldiers:

They arrived in Egypt, fresh and innocent, imbued with the creed in which they had been brought up. They believed that the British empire was the greatest force for good the world had ever known. They expected gratitude from the Egyptians and were pained to find themselves barely tolerated (p. 23).

Simon thinks that the Egyptians should be glad to have their country to protect them, but Harriet faces him with the truth:

They don't think we're protecting them they think we're making use of them. And so we are, we're protecting the Suez canal and the route to India and Clifford's oil company(14).

As Olivia Manning tries to picture the relation between the Egyptians and the British who live under the illusion that they have "brought them justice and prosperity.. shown them how people ought to live". (15) John Marlowe writes in the **Four Aspects of Egypt**:

The British occupiers came as benevolent despots, as conquerors, as a master race, to put the Egyptian house in order, and to govern people who, as far as the British were convinced, had proved unable to govern themselves, .. they were sent to do things which the Egyptians were deemed incapable of doing properly for themselves, .. the British occupiers, civilian officials, soldiers and business-

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men developed a collective feeling of superiority, a collective disdain towards the Egyptians of all classes (16)

On the other hand, the feeling of superiority, restraint and disdain evident in representing Egypt and the Egyptians disappears when Olivia Manning turns to the "British colony". She moves easily within the circle of her community. It is a diverse society comprising types of the English living in Egypt during the war. The range is very wide including upper-class members like Sir Desmond Hooper and his wife who live in a "Turkish fortress" near Fayoum with a "boad" and "safragies". Lord Hooper, who "looked over his visitors" (17) is always prepared to deal with any situation. Therefore, with the composure and pride of an English Lord he refuses to accept the reality of the death of his son. Mr. Clifford represents another type, the civilians who work in private English enterprises:

He's an agent for an oil company but he's not as grand as he'd like to be. He doesn't belong to the set that plays polo and gives gambling parties so, to show his superiority, he's taken to Ancient Egypt in a big way.. He's English but doesn't care for England. The Cliffords have lived here for generation. The men go home to find English wives so the family maintains its Englishness. Their traditions are English, but their money is not (p. 22).

Besides the individuals who live richly in Egypt and who, as Ben Pripps believes, should be "given the boot" (p. 62) we meet several middle class characters and professional associated with the "organization" that shares with the British Embassy the importance of being the representatives of the British Empire. In a subtle statement Olivia Manning illuminates and defines the relation between the two centres of power:

The Organization men. Feeling themselves inferior had been inclined to jeer at the diplomats who, in times of danger, saw the Organization as another unnecessary problem (p. 130).

However, the Organization men form a core part in The Levant Trilogy. It is through this Organization that the heroine, Mrs. Harriet Pringle, comes to Egypt with her husband, Guy Pringle, is an employee in the Institute. Most of the civilians, who appear in the three novels-Lord Professor Pinkrose, Professor Beaker, the poet Castlebar and the actor, Aidan Sheridan are somehow involved in the activities of this seemingly cultural organization. Gracey, the Director, "treated it as a mere extension of his social life" (p. 57). Therefore, when he flees to Jerusalem as the Germans approach Alamein. Lord Bevington, the president of the council in England deposes him and appoints Guy Pringle in his place "to get the Institute on its feet". (p. 129) Guy is a complex, cultured, helpful man who is wholly devoted to the service of others at the expense of his home life. His strong sense of obligation towards the outer world causes a rift between him and his wife. The conflict between the young couple begins in **The Danger Tree** but is elaborated in the following two volumes of the trilogy as the focus moves away from the historical background to purely human relations.

Olivia Manning proceeds to depict the activities, interests and behaviour of the British community. In addition to Simon's biased description of Egypt and the Egyptians, she distinctly refers to the places of entertainment they visit. It is interesting to note that the English tradition of class distinction is clearly demonstrated as she socially classifies the Anglo-Egyptian Union, the Gezira Sporting Club and Groppi's Garden. Apart from the brisk acute description of places and their association, the consistent observation of Olivia Manning is manifest in her references to the behaviour of the members of her own community. While Lady Hooper admits that the whole set-

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up makes her sick (p. 179) and Harriet sums up their life in Egypt as a "dishonest game" (p. 105) the poet Aidan Sheridan wonders how:

The English do become odd here. Ordinary couples who'd remain happily together in Ealing or pinner, here take on a different character. They think themselves Don Juans or tragedy queens, and throw fits of wild passion and make scenes in public. (p. 105)

Against this canvas Simon Boulderstone embarks on his journey to the battlefield. With a clear historic sense and as accuracy of geographic detail, the author following up the route of the convoy from Kasr El-Nil Barracks, past Mena House and the Pyramids, through Alexandria till it reaches Mersa Matrouh. this time, Simon's outlook on Egypt is different:

The corporal did not give the pyramids a look and Simon, seeing for the second time the small one sliding out from behind the greater, felt less wonder and said nothing.. Until then, Simon had still been attached to the known world but now it was disappearing behind him. He felt apprehensive, disconnected and rootless, and asked himself what on earth he was doing, going off like this into the unknown? (p. 43).

The fear and anxiety of Simon as he travels across the desert into the unknown is expressed against an exact picture of the convoy, manpower and ammunition. His apprehensions increase as Major Hardy dubiously questions how long can the "Aussie" (18) 9th Division and the 8th Army, which is made up of kiwis, South Africans and a few Indians hold out. Eventually, when the sergeant tells him of their sudden retreat after a temporary victory,

he flares up and he fearfully asks "where do you think they are now? (p. 19).

The Danger Tree paves the way for the real battle. It anticipates the strategies and tactics of World War II before indulging in the particulars of the battle of Alamein in the second volume of the trilogy. "The giant pincer movement "is explained by Harriet Pringle on a wall map," ... She pointed the two sets of pins, one in the desert, the other in the Ukraine, converging on the Middle East like two black claws". (p.74) Discussing the war Olivia Manning does not restrict herself to its development on one front. Her vision extends to encompass all fronts: "If the Ukraine collapses, what's to stop them? we can't even keep them out of Egypt". (p. 74) Ironically, she states, "People here are living in a fool's paradise. They think if the desert situation's all right, they're all right. They forget we're threatened on another front". (p. 153)

The prelude to the battle is sharply individualized in the moving description of Simon Boulderstone as he waits with his column for the outbreak of war. The dread and panic that dominates the battlefield are particularized and expressed through his feelings. Hostility, sympathy, solitude, boredom, anxiety - are all subtly blended and superbly imparted as the days are wasted in waiting.

Besides, the "dreary experience" allows Olivia Manning to ruminate about the innumerable thoughts that flutter in the mind and heart of Simon: his lost brother, Hygo, the fragility of his major, Arnold's sensitivity to animals as well as the difference between him and Trench. But soon the tedium ends with the arrival of the column to the threshold of the battle, the Alamein Line. The faculty to express the feelings of the soldiers at the pitch of excitement before the outbreak of war proves Olivia Manning's ingenuity as a "novelist" and not as a "woman novelist" confined within the realm of women's experience or a historian interested in the accumulation of dry facts.

The danger that spreads over the complex human relations in this novel is symbolized by its title, **"The Danger Tree"**. It embraces the sensations of both the civilians and the military, for as the danger of immediate war threatens the warriors on the front line, the marriage of Harriet and Guy Pringle is endangered by the profligate Edwina. This danger is reinforced by another symbol, a concrete tree that Harriet could see from the window of her room in the Embassy flat. "Protected by its presence" (p. 161) she "loved the tree" (p. 138) and called it "our own tree" (p. 166) But as the rift between her and her husband expands, Guy describes "the tree as a nuisance that cuts off the light". (p. 138) He asks his wife "to give up that damned tree. I hate (he hates) the sight of it staring at me through the window". (p. 166) As he emphatically says so Harriet feels that one day she will have to give it up. (p. 167)

The tree used to be a source of warmth and comfort to Harriet, but, once Dobson identifies it with the poisonous mango tree it comes to symbolize decay and death. She foresees the disintegration of her relationship with Guy in moving to another room where "there (is) no one to befriend her". (p. 183) On the front line the danger is graver and deadly for, while she predicts coming disaster, Simon discovers the death of his brother, Hugo.

In **The Battle Lost and Won** (1979), Harriet Pringle and Simon Boulderstone, together with other members of the British community fight their own personal battles against the events of the battle of Alamein. Appalled and grieved at the loss of his brother, Simon goes to Cairo for a short holiday; but his outlook on the world is now entirely changed: "There is no wonder left in the world". (20) Cairo is a "mad-house" (p. 26) and his fascinating companions disgust him.

Disillusioned by the horrors of the war that bereaved him of his brother, Simon revolts against the environment that surrounds him in Cairo and in the battlefield. On seeing Terry and Tony, the Cherry pickers, he ironically won-

ders how those two priceless specimens have not come under the protection of BPHA, The Bureau for the Preservation of Hereditary Aristocracy, which discriminates between soldiers and keeps dukes and lords at the base for their safety. If Egypt and the Egyptians are obliquely portrayed in **The Danger Tree** the English community is also criticized in **The Battle Lost and Won**. Simon's disillusionment by the tragedy of war grants Olivia Manning the opportunity to criticize "... the oddity, tragedy and comedy - the fundamental strangeness- of a highly structured fractured society". (21) In his criticism of **The Balkan Trilogy** James Parkhill compares Olivia Manning with George Eliot and believes that she:

is here, on the same ground, describing in geological detail the strata of a society. She asks questions similar to those asked by G. Eliot - her own questions echo back at her: there is no answer but disenchantment. (p. 22)

The disenchantment in **The Battle Lost and Won** urges Simon to return to the front line more determined on revenge for his brother. For him the significance of war has changed. Associated with his own personal crisis, it no more means the victory of England, but revenge for Hugo.

Olivia Manning's talent in unfolding event and character simultaneously is evident in her description of Simon's reappearance at the battlefield. This event allows her to portray indirectly the change brought about in the character of Major Hardy and many of the warriors whose lives were deranged by war. (22) In the same strain, she proceeds to describe Simon's new job, as a "liaison officer", and the nature of his feelings when he leaves his friends. (56) The serious impact of war on the human soul is further expounded in the author's impressive account of the notable change that overcomes Simon when he discovers the loss of his wife's photograph. Olivia Manning excels in reflecting Simon's sensations as his thoughts wander from his wife to Ed-

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wina and Hugo; from the particular to the general issues of life. First, he feels" a certain pity for her and for all womankind. In a world where men died young, what was a girl to do? (p. 83) There was no one to answer him and as he realized how hungry he was, he forgot his own questions and started to run". (p. 84) Furthermore, the fastidious details of the fourth day of the battle are transmitted through the observant eye of Simon Boulderstone. Objective as it may appear, the immediate image is remoulded by his confused thought and perturbed soul. Looking at the ruin and destruction brought on Capuzzo, he".. tried to imagine Ridley's small town shattered as this place was shattered, and he said to him self, Lord, the things we do to other people's countries!" (p. 133) Even at the moment of victory he wonders about post-war problems.

Finally, wounded in the battle, he starts to think of Death which, "for some minutes.. seemed like a fantasy then he realized it could be a reality. The action had moved so far forward, he was likely to bleed to death before help came". (p. 164)

If we leave aside Simon's battle that is concurrent with the desert battle of Alamein, and turn to the other battles fought in the background, we find that the rift between Harriet and Guy widens as the war progresses. "Dissatisfaction- chiefly Harriet's was eroding the Pringle's marriage". (p. 42) Guy does not change. (p. 52) Guy does not change. His allegiance to the outer world made one of his students call him an "Oriental". In Rumania and Greece other people "thought the same and Harriet felt he was disseminated among so many people that there was little left for her" (p. 44) In fact, the misunderstanding between them stems from their divergent natures and philosophy of life.

As the marriage cools off, the canvas of the narrative is extended by Harriet's visit to Upper Egypt where the cholera epidemic spreads. Despite the

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abundant references to the ancient Egyptian monuments in Luxor and Aswan - The Karnac, the temple of Ammon, The Valley of the kings, the gardens of Elephantine, The Temple of Luxor- Egypt continues to be associated with disease and death. Looking out from the window of the train, Harriet and Angela, could see nothing but graves, not simply dozens of them but hundreds". (p. 111) The funerals aggravate their nervous condition and simultaneously ruin the beauty of Upper Egypt. But while Harriet and Angela, Aidan Sheridan, the poet-actor, whom Harriet previously met in Alexandria and meets again in Luxor, give a different, but swift perspective to the Picture. He ponders over the greatness of Egypt saying:

Egypt is unpredictable. You never know what it will do to you. I hated it at first, then it grew on me. It's like a mother you detest, yet are tied to in spite of yourself. I think it's the place where we all began. It's here where we were born first and lived out the infancy of the soul. (p. 120)

Soon he shifts to the reminiscences of his experience on the British ship torpedoed at the beginning of the war on its way to Canada. Such reflections enlarge the dimensions and scope of the narrative. They exemplify the flashback technique used by Olivia Manning to revive memories of the heroine's life in Rumania, Greece and her first days in Egypt. Here, the technique acquires a double function, because while it revives the past, it prophesies the bombardment of the "Queen of Sparta". The narrative in **The Levant Trilogy** oscillates between the past and the present to give the reader a fertile panorama of the war and its background. On her return from Upper Egypt, Harriet in Cairo. This enables Olivia Manning to investigate other aspects of Egypt and to introduce a particularly remarkable Egyptian character, Dr. Shafik, who is the only educated Egyptian presented in this trilogy. The native Egyptians do not exceed the porters, drivers, safragis, ignorant drago-

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men and semi-literate Egyptian officers. Dr. Shafik in an enquiry about her health, mockingly tells her: "Could we let a member of your great empire die here in our poor country?" (p. 142) The ironic tone is sustained when he refers to the desert battle in "a tone of teasing scorn" as: "Two armies going backwards and forwards in the desert chasing each other like fools!" (p. 143) Dr. Shafik, the violent anti-British, belonging to the Nationalist party, also gives the arrogant prejudiced Harriet a moral lesson about neglecting poor old Miss Copeland:

So you left her alone and it was an Egyptian peasant who showed pity! You see, here in Egypt, we live together. We look after our old people. (p. 143).

However, Guy and Harriet Pringle continue to blame "the climate" of Egypt for the sordid state their marriage has reached. Their dilemma is one aspect of the unnatural complex human relationships established in war time.

Therefore, at the insistence of Guy, Harriet decides to return to England on the evacuation ship, "The Queen of Sparta", but, at the last minute, the glory of the Levant conquers her. She adopts Aidan's view of Egypt and feels miserable about leaving it. Her fancy "expands through the Levant" and by the end of the novel, she decides to "cross Sinai.. for all the wonders of the Levant are on the other side". (p. 184).

The theme of Harriet and Guy Pringle cannot be detached from the history of the British Institute in Cairo. Supposedly it is a cultural organization established to spread English culture and tradition; but, Olivia Manning sees deeper roots for the men "clad in their hairy tweed jackets, seeking to subdue.. with productions of Shakespeare .."(23) Their activities are closely affiliated to the course of politics in the Orient. Lord Pinkrose insists that his

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lecture at the Institute should be "a big social narrative, especially that he invites the king! Ironical enough, the big occasion is transformed into another battlefield where Pinkrose is murdered. The illusiveness with which Olivia Manning introduces the two Jews, Hertiz and Allain at the beginning of the novel and the dubious atmosphere that surrounds them insinuate their accusation, though the event is not further pursued. The strange relationships of war time are further expounded by another two illustrations. Lady Angela Hooper and the poet Castlebar as well as Edwina and the Irish Lord Peter Lisdoonvarna. The experience of the two women represents a characteristic aspect of the vast canvas. It is continuously drawn against the events of the war:

Delighted by her success, she laughed and winked at Harriet, but this mood did not last. The latest communique from the front stated, 'Axis forces in full retreat! This news, that had rejoiced the British in Cairo, had merely thereby perturbed Angela
(p. 87)

With great understanding and a keen perception of human nature, Olivia Manning delineates the dilemma of single women lost in the torrents of war. Their aspirations and struggle for security as well as their anguish and restlessness are further elaborated in **The Sum of Things**. However, it is significant to note that as the action in **The Battle Lost and Won** rapidly moves, the mango tree makes "... a dramatic appearance out of nowhere, feathering its bare branches with mauve blossom, mistaking the autumn for spring!" (p. 65) Olivia Manning discloses the struggle of her characters, at whom the tree "stares", (p. 126) only against the universal transient battle of Alamein, but also against a permanent background symbolised by the ancient history of Egypt and Nature.

In a lucid animating style, Olivia Manning reproduces in **The Sum of**

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Things (1980) post-war life with all its sufferings and betrayals and frustrations. The 8th Army left Egypt and Cairo, no longer a base town, became a quiet peaceful city. Simon, who is treated at a hospital in Helwan becomes the target of sympathy. Edwina, who formerly neglected him, visits him at the request of the benevolent Guy. He, in turn, believing that Harriet died on the wrecked "Queen of Sparta" "begins to look about him for an image to adopt in her place. The only one that presented itself at that time was the young Lieutenant, Simon Bulderstone. (25) Olivia Manning follows the slow recovery of Simon with remarkable precision that is occasionally intercepted by scanty references to the movement of the English forces in Tunisia (p. 71). His afflictions and misery increase as he perceives the compassion of his friends. The author tells us that "the soothing, simplified speech reserved for infants and invalids" (p. 27) aggravate his suffering. However, this despondent atmosphere is interrupted by the pathetic description of the sudden sensation of his dead limbs, a hopeful sign of recovery:

but was distracted as the insect movement repeated itself in his thigh. Then a trickle, down to his knee and he again touched the spot. He looked at his fingers. There was no blood. He was afraid to hope that the trickle was a trickle of life.. His whole consciousness was gathered on the area of the sensation. A pause, then the insect moved in his other leg and the same sticky trickle went down to his knee.. Cautiously, he tried to press his thighs together and for the first time since his injury he felt his legs touch each other. (p. 29-30).

It is essential to point out here that Simon's recovery is double-fold. The physical recovery is concurrent with a radical change in his character. The evolution is observed in his altered view of the pyramids (p. 121), his marri-

age, (p. 123) and his parents. (p. 124).

Simon's vision of life is thoroughly changed by the experience of war. The human tragedy made him see the reality of things. Edwina was a fantasy of his adolescence, but, now, it seems as though "a film of dust had settled on the golden image". (p.59) She makes new friends: Dr. Beltado, an Italian authority on ancient culture, the lawyer Jamil and Halal who entertains her and takes her around in Damascus. Olivia Manning evokes through the visits of Harriet an exquisite image of ancient and modern Damascus. In the Umayyad Mosque, Halal gives her an account of its history.

And at the dinner in Jamil's house all the guests are men-Moslems, christians and Jews. Nevertheless "without Guy, she was not enjoying herself very much". (p. 61) She decides to go to the exotic city of Baalabek as an escape from the thoughts that haunt her, "the pleasing langour of the spirit that the Arabs caled "Khayf" (p. 103) Amidst that feeling of loneliness and solitude, Olivia Manning starts to unravel the true but complex emotions of Harriet towards her husband.

From Baalabek Harriet goes to Jerusalem where Olivia Manning's interest in the perplexity of mankind rather than historical fact reaches its climax. There, the climate is ideal; but in an objective unsentimental style, the author paints the hatred that dominates the holy place and the lives of its inhabitants:

The Polish Jews hate the German Jews, and the Russians hate the Polish and the German. They're all in small communities, each one trying to corner everything for themselves: jobs, food, flats, houses. Then there's the Orthodox Jews, they got here first and want to control the show... Then all the Jews combine in hating the Arabs and the Arabs and

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*Jews combine in hating the Arabs and the Arabs
and Jews combine in hating the British police, and
the police hate the government officials who look
down on them and won't let them join the club.
What a place! God knows who'll get it in the end
but whoever it is, I don't envy them. (p. 139).*

The ceremony of the Holy Fire in Jerusalem which emphasises the dis-sension and hatred that spread over the city serves as the climax of **The Sum of Things**. As the Patriarch brings for mankind the divine gift of fire, Harriet realizes that she wants only one thing: "to contact Guy and assure him she was alive and well". (p. 163) But this happy moment of revelation is darkened by the news of Aidan Sheridan's suicide. Aidan "had wanted response, reassurance and affection, perhaps even love", (p. 165) feelings rarely obtained at the time of war. Hence, he ends his miserable life.

The sudden arrival of Harriet in the embassy flat on Edwina's wedding day intensifies the development of the novel. Changed to the core, she does not see any change in the character of Guy. His devotion and moral obligations to the outer world remain unchanged. In the usual words he tells her,

*I've too much to do. After the Institute, I have to
meet some young Egyptians and give them a talk
about self-determination. I was invited by Harriet's
doctor, Shafik, and I can't let him down. You can
see that.. (p. 176).*

Now Harriet "can see that" and when he leaves the living room, she reassures herself that "nothing has changed". (p. 172). In fact, a lot has changed, because, when she enters her room she realizes that the mango tree has disappeared. It is replaced by "the diamond brooch" which Guy took back from Edwina and put in his wife's drawer. (p. 172) The danger that threatened her

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marriage in **The Danger Tree** and was symbolized by the poisonous mango tree is substituted by understanding and love. On the other hand, Guy feels that the transformation in Harriet's character "moves her out from under his influence" (p. 144). He waits for her to relinquish her independent attitude, but she never does. Harriet sees "the world as reality" while he does not. After all, "In an imperfect world, marriage is a matter of making do with what one has chosen" (p. 200).

In conclusion it is significant to note that the English twentieth century novel is highly prejudiced against Egypt and those who favoured her are very few. In **The Levant Trilogy** Olivia Manning shares with her contemporaries, Lawrence Durrell and P.H. Newby, the sense of superiority to the Egyptians. In **The Alexandria Quartet** Egypt and the Egyptians are wholly misrepresented. At the beginning of *Justine* he asks:

Capitally, what is this city of ours? what is assumed in the word Alexandria? In a flash my mind's eye shows me a thousand dust-tormented streets. Flies and beggars own it today - and those who enjoy an intermediate existence between either. Five races, five languages, a dozen creeds: five fleets turning through their greasy reflections behind the harbour bar. But there are more than five sexes and only demotic Greek seems to distinguish among them. (26).

In **The Picnic at Sakkara** a strange feeling of love is mingled with P.H. Newby's sense of superiority. Professor Perry tells his wife:

ever since I arrived in this country I've been walking the back of a knife. Extraordinarily hard to keep a balance. I can't be neutral. I can't be pas-

sive. Either I hate the country or I like it very much. Either I loathe my students or I admire them. If I don't feed my admiration and yes, love if you like.. I could easily fill up with hate. (27).

But the work of Olivia Manning differs from her contemporaries in many respects. First, **The Levant Trilogy** covers a wider perspective that includes Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. Egypt is only a part of the large canvas she evokes in her narrative. Secondly, World War II forms an important aspect in the vision of the writer. That vision is represented through the eyes of a British soldier, Simon Boulderstone, who portrays the details of the war theme with an exactitude and an accuracy that could not have escaped the eye of the press reporter, Olivia Manning. Thirdly, the background information is rendered through the experience of diverse members of the British community whose sense of place is firmly associated with their personal problems and determined by the unnatural human conditions of war-time. Therefore, with a superb delicacy of perception. Olivia Manning analyzes and expresses the anxiety, suffering and conflicts of all her characters, the military as well as the civilians. **The Levant Trilogy** starts as a documentary of the desert war, but, subtly evolves into a human tragedy.

It is essential to point out that the approach, technique and interests of Olivia Manning in **The Levant Trilogy** undergo a remarkable development. The content and structure vary from one novel to the other giving the trilogy a unique character that reveals a blending of minute objective allusions with permanent human values. Of the three volumes that form the series. **The Danger Tree** stands out as the most documentary. The narrative opens a few months before the battle of Alamein. It proceeds to describe minutely the hero's adventures in Cairo before going to the front line, his journey to the battlefield, and ends with the discovery of the death of his brother. The delineation of the canvas to the great events is intercepted by a lively descrip-

tion of the preparations for war and the first unsuccessful encounter with the Germans. Olivia Manning concentrates in depicting the details of the second fierce battle of Alamein in the second volume, *The Battle lost and Won* but as the action develops we realize that other battles are fought. Universal and purely personal battles unfold simultaneously. The chronicle of the great historical events in World War II reveals more enduring human battles in which the characters struggle for permanent issues. In the third volume, *The Sum of Things*, which is partly set in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, the human individual battles come to an end. The documentary quality paramount in *The Danger Tree*, subdued and balanced in *The Battle Lost and Won* recedes before the human predicament in the last novel.

Historical details recoil before the radical alterations brought about in the characters through the ugly experience of war. War illuminates the complexity of human nature and as Olivia Manning writes in the Coda to the last novel.

at last, peace, precarious peace, came down upon the world and the survivors could go home. Like the stray figures left on the stage at the end of a great tragedy, they had now to tidy up the ruins of war and in their hearts bury the noble dead (28).

NOTES

1. **The Levant Trilogy** comprises **The Danger Tree** (1977), **The Battle Lost and Won** (1979) and **The Sum of Things** (1980).
2. Derek Jewell, ed., "Introduction: a different kind of war" **Alamein and The Desert War** (London: Sphere Books Limited, 1967) p. 7.
3. Olivia Manning, 'Cairo: back from the Blue: in Jewell, **Alamein and The Desert War**, p. 161.
4. **The Balkan Trilogy** by Olivia Manning includes: **The Great Fortune** (1960). **The Spoilt City** (1962) and **Friends and Heroes** (1965).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
6. Erskin B. Childers. **The Road to Suez** (London: Macmillan and Kee, 1962). p. 46.
7. Manning, **The Danger Tree**, p. 24.
8. Manning, "Cairo: back from the Blue," p. 162.
9. Who is hte "foreigner" in Egypt is a subject of discussion among the "foreigners" in **The Danger Tree** on pp. 19, p. 66, p. 73.
10. Harry J. Mooney, Addendum to his article on **The Balkan Trilogy** entitled "Olivia Manning: Witness to history" in **Twentieth Century Novelists**, ed. T.F.Staley (Totwa: N.Y: Barnes and Nobel, 1982) p. 59.
11. Manning, **The Danger Tree**. p. 25.
12. A Cultural organization similar to the British Council.
13. Manning, **The Danger Tree**, p. 132.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 23. A commensurate passage exists in Olivia Manning's article in **The Sunday Times Magazine**, above, p. 162.

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15. Manning, **The Danger Tree**, p. 22.
16. John Marlowe, **Four Aspects of Egypt** (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966), p. 10.
17. Manning, **The Danger Tree**, p. 31.
18. Australian.
19. Manning, **The Danger Tree**, p. 45.
20. Olivia Manning, **The Battle Lost and Won**, (Ny York: Atheneum, 1979). p9.
21. Hames Parkhill-Rathbone, "Olivia Manning's Dilemmas" in **Books and Bookmen** (Surrey: Brevet publishing, August 1971) p. 21.
22. Manning, **The Battle Lost and Won**, p. 52.
23. Parkhill- Rathbone, p. 22.
24. Manning, **The Battle Lost and Won.**, p. 138.
25. Olivia Manning. **The Sum of Things** (New York, Atheneum, 1981), p. 5.
26. Lawrence Durrell, **Justine** (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) p. 11.
27. P.H. Newby, **The Picnic at Sakkara** (London: Faber and Faber, 1955) p. 203.